

Walt Lenk, K1YTY — 1960's WARS Secretary

By Scott Nacey, KK6IK



*Walt Lenk, K1YTY in the 1980's
source: The Wellesley Townsman*

I never knew Walt Lenk, K1YTY but he was important to WARS. Walt served as the WARS Secretary into the Mid-1960's – beyond the WARS attendance sheets, little record of Walt remains but digging into *The Townsman* archives gives us a glimpse of his life. Outside of WARS, Lenk's life in Wellesley is now represented as series of short newspaper notices that, together, show a man who was a US Army veteran of World War II and part of the towns social fabric for more than two decades. His name appeared now and then in *The Townsman* between the 1960s and early 1970s — most often buried among local announcements — but those small items document steady civic service that connected church life classrooms, basements, and ham radios across the town.

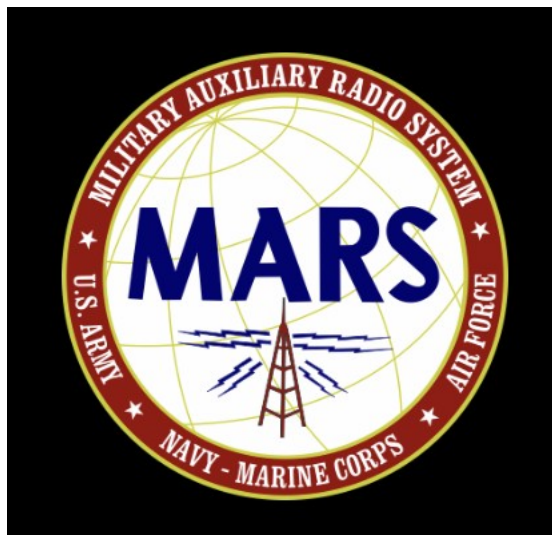
Novice Classes

The first clear glimpse of Lenk's community work comes from *The Townsman* of **November 23, 1967**, under the headline "*Wellesley 'Hams' Offer Free Classes.*" It describes the Wellesley Amateur Radio Society (WARS) opening its doors to beginners and to newly licensed operators wanting to move up the Federal Communications Commission ranks.

*"Those desiring further information may contact **Walter Lenk, club secretary**, at 237-9289," the article noted.*

That same piece reminds readers that the Society had been formed during the Korean War to train operators for Civil Defense. If you were curious about antennas, code, or community preparedness in the late 1960s, it was Walter Lenk who picked up the phone.

Army MARS Affiliation



Just a year later, his name surfaced again in a front-page item of **December 5, 1968**. The paper's "Seen From the Bridge" column carried a short paragraph amid local commentary and world news:

"Walter Lenk urges us to tell all townspeople with servicemen overseas or nearer at home, who may not get home for Christmas, that the MARS (Military Affiliate Radio System) is ready to transmit messages."

At the height of the Vietnam era, when long-distance calls were rare and expensive, the Army Military Affiliate Radio System (AMARS) linked civilians and troops through a network of amateur radio operators. In the 1960's and 70's, "Phone Patches" connected an amateur radio transceiver to the public telephone network through a hybrid audio coupler, allowing a ham operator to relay a two-way conversation between an overseas radio station and a local telephone. Lenk's brief line in the paper signaled to families that someone local — someone in Wellesley — could help a holiday message cross the globe.

For those unfamiliar, according to the 2025 AMARS website:

"Army Military Auxiliary Radio System (AMARS) is an elite group of dedicated citizen volunteers who support the Department of Defense (DoD) in a variety of circumstances, including complex catastrophes and cyber denied or impaired conditions."

The column offered no extra detail or photo, only the fact that Walt had volunteered his equipment and time. Walt was both an organizer within WARS and a messenger to the broader community, making sure townspeople knew the club's capabilities.

Civil Defense

By **April 1969**, Wellesley Civil Defense formally saluted its radio volunteers. Walt is included in the photo displayed in Al Graf's section of this 1960's article.

The accompanying text describes ten fixed and mobile radio stations throughout the town and credits the group's reliable Sunday-morning drills — "never cancelled," the article proudly said. Director George P. de Coen cited their performance during the Northeast blackout of 1965 and the flood alert of 1968, as well as the town's Veterans Day Parade. Lenk, using his callsign K1YTY, operated from 22 Priscilla Circle and took part in Air Force MARS message handling alongside Cannell, Allen, and Emerson .

1972 Simulated Emergency Test (SET)

As with Al Graf, a *Townsmen* piece dated February 3, 1972, reported on the annual *Simulated Emergency Test* sponsored by the American Radio Relay League. Once again, the Wellesley Civil Defense team was out early on a Sunday morning. Under Communications Officer Marshall H. Cannell, eleven town stations joined the exercise. The roster reads: Roger P. Smith W1EOA, Albert H. Graf W1OQP, Dr. William H. Emerson WA1EVD — and Walter E. Lenk K1YTY, Publicity Officer, 22 Priscilla Circle .

The brief paragraph allotted to him — "Publicity Officer" — hints that by then he was the bridge between the technical volunteers and the public they served. His recurring presence in these reports shows that when the club needed information distributed — whether about drills, classes, or holiday message programs — he made sure it appeared in print by managing a list of newspaper and radio station contacts and mailing them at least once a month.

Only two months later, another March 30 1972 story on the Wellesley Road Race again lists the same network of call signs. Civil Defense radio operators, "experienced in radio communication," were to man six short-wave stations along the 9.6-mile course. Among them: "Walter E. Lenk, K1YTY, C.D. Publicity Officer, 22 Priscilla Circle." Even a footrace became a communications exercise — an opportunity to test lines, antennas, and teamwork under friendly conditions.

Retirement and more Service

The civic notices fall silent after the early 1970s, but *The Townsman* picks him up again more than a decade later in March 1985, when the business section announced a personal change:

“Walter Lenk, a Priscilla Circle resident, has joined the staff of Cape Cod’s Dick Soffey Realty in Chatham. A graduate of Bates College, Lenk also has a master’s degree in social work from Boston University. He recently retired with almost 30 years government service as a clinical social worker with the Veterans Administration in Worcester.”

After years of weekend drills and local meetings, the man who once handled MARS traffic for soldiers was turning a professional page — heading toward Cape Cod and a gentler pace of life. Later in life, Walt divides his time between Chatham and Wellesley.

The last record of Walt in the *Townsman* came sixteen years later, on January 18, 2001, in the obituary section. It is plain, factual, and dignified:

“Walter E. Lenk of Orleans, formerly of Wellesley, died Jan. 14, 2001, at Cape Cod Hospital in Hyannis. He was 76. Born in Boston on June 26, 1924, he was raised in Belmont. He graduated from Belmont Hill School and received a bachelor of arts degree from Bates College. In 1956 he earned a master’s degree in social work from Boston University. Mr. Lenk served with the U.S. Army in the European Theatre of World War II.”

The obituary recounts his long service as a professional social worker with the Veterans Administration and notes that he lived in Wellesley Hills before moving permanently to Orleans in 1987. It lists memberships in the Cape Cod Postcard Collectors Club and the Cape Cod Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society, where he again held secretary and editor roles — familiar duties to anyone who knew him from WARS.

Legacy

Read chronologically, those scattered items from 1967 to 2001 outline a life of parallel callings: social work by profession and ham radio by avocation. In the 1960s he was the voice inviting townspeople to learn code or send a holiday greeting. Through the 1970s he maintained the town’s radio readiness, serving as publicity officer for Civil Defense. In the 1980s and 1990s he shifted that steadiness into helping people with homes, veterans, and history.

(sources are kept for a book or online publish later, but not submitted for the Spark Gap)

Primary Sources (All from The Townsman, Wellesley MA):

All information quoted or paraphrased above is taken solely from the following *Wellesley Townsman* issues:

- *Nov 23 1967 – Wellesley ‘Hams’ Offer Free Classes*
- *Dec 5 1968 – MARS Announcement*
- *Apr 24 1969 – Civil Defense Salute*
- *Feb 3 1972 – Simulated Emergency Test*
- *Mar 30 1972 – Road Race Communications*
- *Mar 7 1985 – Professional Move to Orleans*
- *Jan 18 2001 – Obituary*